

## INDIGENE/SETTLER PHENOMENON AND CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

Beginning in colonial times, there have been varying attempts to manage or exploit Nigeria's ethnic, religious and linguistic diversities through various forms of federalism. Since 1966, the country has been divided into 36 states and 774 Local Government Areas. The concept of 'indigeneity' took root in Nigeria's 1979 constitution and lives on in the current 1999 constitution. This system categorizes all Nigerians as indigenes or non-indigenes (the latter also labeled 'settlers') in a region based on where their parents or grandparents were born. The mechanism's intent was to ensure ethnic parity in education and employment, as well as to protect traditional cultures. But in 2006, Human Rights Watch and the International Crisis Group separately reported that the principle has instead systematically marginalized millions of Nigerians and encouraged ethno-linguistic identity politics, which has fanned the flames of inter-communal violence. The mere definition of which groups are indigenous to a region creates many controversies; disputed historical migration patterns and intermarriage often make clear delineations impossible. The policy has become a tool for indigenes across the country to exclude competing 'settlers' from scarce educational, employment and political opportunities, even if these are life-long residents of the community. Not surprisingly, this has led to fierce resentment among the excluded.

In diverse Plateau State, indigeneity has been used by Christian politicians to maintain dominance through exclusion of Muslim Hausa and Fulani 'settlers'. The Jarawa ethnic group is also classified as 'non-indigene', although it also fails to qualify for indigenous status anywhere else in Nigeria. Since 1999 to date in Plateau State, inter-communal fighting arising from disputes over indigeneity, land and religion has resulted in over 550,000 internally displaced persons. April 2006 fighting between members of the Pan and Goma ethnic groups over issues of indigeneity resulted in over 100 killed and 8,000 displaced persons. In 2011, entire villages were massacred; women and children were killed in their hundreds.

The British claim to lands in today's Nigeria was internationally recognized in 1885. Initially administered as a concession of the Royal Niger Company from 1900, Nigeria as a formal British colony, was ruled as three distinct political units; the Northern

Protectorate, the Southern Protectorate and Lagos Colony. In 1906 the Lagos Colony and Southern Protectorate were merged. In 1914 the three units were amalgamated into one nation. That is, the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Partly in recognition of the major ethno-linguistic differences between Igbo and Yoruba in the south, the Southern Protectorate was split in 1939 into Eastern and Western Provinces. This was given constitutional backing when in 1947 Nigeria was divided into Northern, Eastern and Western regions, and a move which gave prominence to the three dominant groups: Hausa-Fulani in the north, Igbo in the east and Yoruba in the west. Each of the former three regions had minorities who formed themselves into movements agitating for constitutional safeguards against opposition from the larger ethnic group that dominated the affairs of the region. The minority 'problem' became a major political question when it became clear that Nigeria would adopt a federal system of government. Since each region was dominated politically by one ethnic group, minorities began aspiring to separate existences. This question was important in the 1954 federal and 1957 constitutional conferences. The north and east refused fragmentation, while the west supported the creation of a mid-western state.

Ethnicity has been one of the regular features of African societies of which Nigeria is part. Nigeria has had more than its share in ethnic-induced violence. The issue of ethnicity has become the most viable factor, which explains the social reality of post-colonial Africa. During colonization of African people, colonialists failed to put the issue of cultural differences of various ethnic groupings into consideration before lumping them together in (colonial) state formation. The oversight has constituted and remained one of the greatest challenges of post-colonial Africa.

In the past decades, the Nigeria's experience has shown that the country has a long list of ethnic violence and hostilities various ethnic groupings. Some of these conflicts include the ones in Jos, Umuleri/Aguleri, Ijaw/Itsekiri, Ife/Modakeke, Tiv/Jukun, among others. This is not to say that conflicts did not exist prior to this period. The history and oral tradition of most African societies contain elements of conflicts and ethnic conflicts, and intra-ethnic conflict situations. The problem at present confronting the contemporary African societies is the rage and magnitude of these ethnic problems. The issue of ethnicity has remained a very visible feature

of the Nigeria nation.

#### CAUSES OF INDIGENE/ SETTLER CRISES IN NIGERIA

- The main cause of indigene/settler dichotomy has been discovered by various scholars to be resource based. Ethnicity is being often employed as a tool by the political elites in their pursuit of state power and resources. The flag of ethnicity is flown in the allocation of state resources and power sharing.
- Primordial loyalties, prevailing subjective perception and sentiment are other issues that characterise ethnicity. People tend to feel physically safe and psychologically secured among the group they perceive as members of their ancestral root. Therefore, intrusion is perceived with a high degree of suspicion and mostly repelled if meager resources also have to be shared.
- Fear of dominance and external imperialism is also a factor responsible for the consciousness of dissimilarity among people who had hitherto lived together for ages. This is evident in the relationship between Hausa- Fulani and the Vum peoples of Sango- Kataff in Plateau State.
- In the last few decades, Nigerians have been going through difficult times of ethnic conflicts, violence and antagonism. The weak state structure, characterised by endemic poverty, winner-takes-all philosophy, institutional deficiencies, among others, propel inter-ethnic rivalry. The general attitude of the political elites reinforces the inter-ethnic hatred that is experienced in Africa.
- A major issue again is imperialism and colonialism impacted on ethnicity and ethnic conflicts, which are traceable to the colonial masters' systems of administration, arbitrary delimitation and partitioning.

These conflicts have defied the long adopted western models and paradigms of conflict management. African traditional alternatives to conflict resolution might remain imperative for adoption in the new millennium.

In fact, it is paramount for the people and government of Africa to live above primordial sentiments and subjective perception as well as enemy-image among various ethnic nationalities that dominate the state of affairs on the continent. It is

no gainsaying that the problem of ethnicity can be regarded as a veritable source of underdevelopment and bad governance in the country.

Thus, ethnic conflict has been at the forefront of international political debates for the past decade, which aroused concerns about practical solutions to reconcile diverse ethnic groups in the modern democratic state. In examining the concept of ethnic conflict and the impact of variables such as governance, civil-military relations, economics and religion on ethnic identity in Nigeria, advocacy for a 'power-sharing model' that promotes integration and cooperation, will serve as a means of overcoming differences and establishing a basis for dialogue.

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